International Journal of Conflict and Violence

DOI: 10.4119/ijcv-3945
IJCV: Vol. 14/2020

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Vol. 14/2020

ISSN: 1864–1385

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Sexual aggression is one of the most humiliating forms of gender-based violence and may profoundly affect victims' physical, mental, and sexual health. This research analyzed the role of previous experiences of sexual coercion by an intimate partner on women's behavioral, cognitive, and emotional responses to a video clip showing a sexual assault involving a couple. Spanish college women with (N = 63) and without (N = 77) experience of sexual coercion indicated the point at which they would leave the situation (response latency), the probability of terminating the relationship if they were the woman in the video, attributions of responsibility to victim and perpetrator, and their emotional state. Victims were less likely to say they would terminate the relationship and reported more negative emotions than did nonvictims, but no differences were found on the response latency and attribution measures. Overall, the results suggest that previous sexual coercion may be related to women's behavioral and emotional responses to situations involving the threat of sexual victimization.

Keywords: Sexual coercion, victimization, perception of sexual assault risk, attributions of responsibility, negative emotions

Acknowledgement: This research was supported by a grant from the Spanish Ministry of Education to the first author [Ref.FPU14-02905], and the financing provided by the Spanish Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness [Ref.PSI2017-84703-R; Ref. PSI-2017-83966-R (MINECO/AEI/FEDER/UE)].

Sexual coercion is a manifestation of male aggression against women that is especially frequent in intimate relationships (Edwards et al. 2014; Smith et al. 2017). For the purposes of this research, the term of sexual coercion is used to refer to an unwanted sexual activity that occurs after a person is pressured in a nonphysical way, for example by telling lies, using persistent verbal pressure to have sex, making false promises, threatening to end the relationship or spread rumors, showing displeasure, or getting angry (Koss et al. 2007; Smith et al. 2018).

Sexual coercion is more common than may be widely recognized. In a study from the United States, 13.2 percent of women reported having experienced one or more incidents of nonphysical sexual coercion at some point in their lifetime, and in 74.7 percent of cases, the perpetrator was a current or former partner (Smith et al. 2017). A very similar prevalence for verbal sexual coercion of 13.3 percent was found

across nine European countries, with the rate for Spain being 15.7 percent (Krahé et al. 2015). Another Spanish study found a prevalence rate of 19.1 percent (Santos-Iglesias and Sierra 2012).

Despite a large body of evidence on the consequences of sexual victimization (for example, Brown, Testa, and Messman-Moore 2009), not much is known about the relationship between the experience of sexual coercion and the recognition of risky situations, especially in interactions with intimate partners. Such knowledge is important because impaired risk awareness is thought to play a critical role in the risk of revictimization, whether within the same relationship or in a new one. The current study sought to address this gap. We examined whether women's behavioral, cognitive, and emotional responses to a scenario involving the risk of sexual assault by an intimate partner varied in relation to two factors: previous experience of sexual coercion by an intimate partner, and increasing severity of sexual violence as the experimental situation unfolds. Behavioral responses were measured by the time the women took to decide they would leave the situation and probably terminate the relationship, cognitive responses were assessed in terms of attributions of responsibility to the perpetrator and the victim, and emotional responses were measured on the valence and control dimensions.

1 Previous Experience of Sexual Assault and Perceptions of Rape

A large body of literature has addressed the effect of sexual assault experiences on the increased risk of being victimized again (revictimization), and impaired risk perception has been identified as a critical mediating variable in explaining this link (see reviews by Decker and Littleton 2018; Rinehart and Yeater 2015). A few studies have compared victims' and nonvictims' awareness of the threat of sexual assault in vignettes with a hypothetical partner, finding that victimized women take longer to recognize the point at which a sexual situation turns risky and it would be time to leave. For example, Soler-Baillo, Marx, and Sloan (2005) found that college women with sexual victimization experiences took longer to realize that a man's behavior became sexually inappropriate in an audio vignette about a date-rape interaction. Several other studies suggest that women with sexual victimization histories are less likely than nonvictimized women to identify threat and decide they would leave the sexually aggressive situation (Gidycz, McNamara, and Edwards 2006; Messman-Moore and Brown 2006; Franklin 2013; Haugen, Salter, and Philipps 2019; Neilson et al. 2018).

How previous experience of sexual victimization influences the decision to terminate a relationship may also be considered as a measure of risk response, even though it is more far-reaching than deciding to leave a specific risky situation and implies a greater degree of conscious reflection. A small number of studies have found that prior experience of sexual coercion by an intimate partner predicted a lower probability of terminating the relationship in hypothetical scenarios (for example if the partner had been unfaithful; Arriaga, Capezza, and Daly 2016; Garrido-Macías and Arriaga 2020).

Experience of sexual victimization has also been linked to the level of attribution of responsibility to other victims (Miller, Amacker, and King 2011). In line with the defensive attribution hypothesis (Shaver 1970), women who had experienced sexual assault perceived greater similarity to the victim and less similarity to the perpetrator than did nonvictimized women, leading to less responsibility attributed to the victim and more responsibility attributed to the perpetrator (Grubb and Harrower 2008; Osman 2011; Amacker and Littleton 2013). Miller et al. (2011) found that a history of sexual assault predicted lower victim responsibility attributions mediated through greater perceived similarity to the victim.

Finally, the experience of sexual victimization may have an impact on emotional responses to sexually risky situations. Abundant research has analyzed the relationship between sexual victimization and emotional outcomes, showing that victims of sexual aggression experience more negative affect, emotional distress, anxiety, anger, frustration, sadness, and disgust than women who had not suffered sexual aggression (Livingston et al. 2004; Mason and Lodrick 2013; Jeffrey 2014). For example, Soler-Baillo et al. (2005) found that victims of sexual assault experienced less positive-valence affect after a vignette about a date-

rape interaction than did nonvictims. These emotions associated with sexual victimization could make women less willing to acknowledge and use emotions as cues that signal the need to escape, undermining risk awareness (Magar, Phillips, and Hosie 2008; Walsh, DiLillo, and Messman-Moore 2012).

To our knowledge, no research to date has specifically examined how prior experience of sexual coercion by an intimate partner relates to women's responses to hypothetical sexually risky situations. The literature closest to this area has found that sexual coercion is perceived negatively, unless a woman has personal reasons to reinterpret or minimize the harmful behavior of the other person (Arriaga et al. 2018). According to *Betrayal Trauma Theory* (Freyd 2020), victims of sexual assault by their intimate partners remember and process the sexual transgression differently from transgressions involving betrayal by individuals with whom victims do not have such a close connection (Gobin and Freyd 2017; Klest, Tamaian, and Boughner 2019). Based on this reasoning, betrayal trauma theory can offer a framework to explain why victims of partner sexual coercion may be less perceptive of partner sexual assault than nonvictims, as indicated by impaired risk awareness and response.

Many studies about the influence of sexual victimization experiences on perceptions of sexual assault have grouped together subjects who had experienced physical and verbal sexual coercion (for example, Soler-Baillo et al. 2005; Messman-Moore and Brown 2006; Haugen et al. 2019). However, because women tend to normalize experiences of verbal sexual coercion (Katz and Tirone 2010; Salwen and O'Leary 2013), and to perceive these forms of violence less negatively than physical forms (Brown et al. 2009; Garrido-Macías, Valor-Segura and Expósito 2020), the current research aimed to analyze how the experience of non-physical sexual coercion relates to behavioral, cognitive, and emotional responses to a sexually risky situation.

2 Increase in the Severity of Sexual Violence

The literature indicates that a perceived increase in the severity of coercive means is related to women's decision to leave a hypothetical situation involving the risk of sexual violence and to terminate a (hypothetical) abusive relationship (Yeater, McFall, and Viken 2011; Garrido-Macías et al. 2020). For example, Yeater et al. (2011) reported that women's response effectiveness increased when vignettes of situations that carried the risk of sexual assault became increasingly violent, but the increase was less pronounced in victimized than in nonvictimized women. Similarly, research has demonstrated that more responsibility is attributed to the victim, less responsibility is attributed to the perpetrator, and a greater probability of continuing the relationship is reported for verbal sexual coercion than for physical force (Katz, Moore, and Tkachuk 2007; Edwards et al. 2012; Garrido-Macías et al. 2020; Garrido-Macías and Arriaga 2020). Further, research has shown that the perceived increase in the severity of violence is related to more negative emotional reactions (Ullman et al. 2007). For example, Jeffrey (2014) demonstrated that more forceful tactics of sexual aggression used by the partner were associated with more negative emotional reactions.

3 The Current Study

The current study integrated findings from several lines of research, summarized above, to analyze the role of experiences of sexual coercion by an intimate partner and the increasing severity of sexual violence in a sexually risky scenario (with a hypothetical partner) in predicting women's responses to the incident. In contrast to previous studies that used written or audiotaped scenarios (Soler-Baillo et al. 2005; Messman-Moore and Brown 2006; Franklin 2013; Haugen et al. 2019), we decided to employ a film clip to increase the realism of the simulated threat situation.

Specifically, we predicted in Hypothesis 1 that women who experienced one or more instances of sexual coercion by an intimate partner would have more difficulties recognizing a sexual assault risk than nonvictims, as indicated by a longer latency for identifying the point at which they would leave the situation and a lower probability of terminating the relationship (Arriaga et al. 2016; Decker and Littleton 2018). According to the information-processing model proposed by Rinehart and Yeater (2015), deciding when to leave the situation reflects the first stage of risk perception at which environmental stimuli are in-

terpreted based on individual experience. Indicating the probability of terminating the relationship with a sexually aggressive partner reflects the second stage of the model, involving decisions about what skills are needed to reduce or avoid future risk.

At the level of cognitive and emotional responses, we predicted that victims, compared to nonvictims, would attribute more responsibility to the perpetrator and less responsibility to the victim (*Hypothesis 2a*) and would experience more negative emotions (*Hypothesis 2b*). Based on the proposition in Hypothesis 1 that victims have a higher threshold for interpreting a situation as risky, the two parts of Hypothesis 2 assume that victims would be more likely to blame the perpetrator and less likely to blame the victim once they have concluded that the situation involves the risk of a sexual assault. Victims are likely to feel more similar to the woman in the video compared to nonvictims, reducing the tendency of victim blaming (Miller et al. 2011). Observing another woman experiencing sexual coercion may remind them their own victimization and trigger more negative emotional responses compared to nonvictims (Soler-Baillo et al. 2005). In combination, Hypotheses 1 and 2 predict a main effect of victim status.

Further, we predicted a main effect of severity: as severity of violence increased participants would attribute more responsibility to the perpetrator and less responsibility to the victim (*Hypothesis 3a*) and would experience more negative emotions (*Hypothesis 3b*). Again, the increased use of coercive behavior by the perpetrator may be seen as clarifying for the participants that a sexual assault is happening, reducing victim-blaming and increasing negative emotional responses (Ullman et al. 2007; Yeater et al. 2011). Finally, we predicted that victims, compared to nonvictims, would show a larger increase in negative perceptions (more responsibility attributed to the perpetrator and less to the victim; *Hypothesis 4a*) and emotional responses (*Hypothesis 4b*) as the severity of the man's behavior increased, because they would be less likely to consider the situation risky at the lower levels of coercive behavior in the earlier phase of the video. This reasoning leads to the prediction of an interactive effect of victim status and increase in severity.

4 Method

4.1 Participants and Design

Participants were 150 students at a Spanish university who self-identified as female and were enrolled in different academic subjects. They were invited to participate in a study about intimate relationships, in which the purpose was to inquire about conflict resolution, emotions, and decision-making, and received course credit for their participation. The sample size was determined *a priori* by a power analysis to detect a moderate effect size [η^2_p = .06], with α =.05 and a power of 80 percent; Faul et al. 2007). Participants' mean age was M = 21.18 years (SD = 3.03), and 86.7 percent self-identified as heterosexual, 4.7 percent as homosexual, and 8 percent as bisexual. Regarding relationship status, 64 percent were in a relationship (mean duration: M = 28.75 months, SD = 32.83 months) at the time of the study. Based on their responses to the Sexual Coercion in Intimate Relationships Scale (SCIRS; Shackelford and Goetz 2004), a categorical variable of sexual coercion experience was defined: Women who did not report any sexual coercion or physical sexual assault were classified as nonvictims (N = 77). Women who endorsed at least one item of (nonphysical) sexual coercion, but no item referring to physical violence, were classified as victims of intimate partner sexual coercion (N = 63). Ten women who reported at least one physical form of sexual assault (regardless of whether they had suffered verbal sexual coercion or not) were excluded, leading to a final sample size of N = 140 (see detailed description below).

The study was a two (previous sexual coercion: victims vs. nonvictims; between-participant factor) by three (increase of violence: Baseline vs. Time 1 vs. Time 2; within-participant factor) design. Based on responses to the video, appraisal of sexual assault risk (indicated by response latency for leaving the situation and probability of terminating the relationship), attributions of responsibility to the victim and the perpetrator, and emotional responses to the film clip were examined as dependent variables.

4.2 Procedure and Materials

Participants completed the measures in the e-prime program under the supervision of a female research

assistant in a separate lab room. After providing consent, participants responded to a baseline measure of emotional state and then watched a video about a couple that ended with the woman having unwanted sex with her male partner. Participants were asked to stop the video when they would leave the situation if they were the woman in the video. At that point (Time 1), they rated their emotional state again, along with the degree of responsibility assigned to the victim and the perpetrator, the perceived severity of the situation (manipulation check), and the probability that they would terminate the relationship. Then, they watched the video again from the beginning to the end, which meant that they saw more severe violent behavior by the man than at Time 1. After the end of the video (Time 2), they again completed the dependent variables and manipulation check. All participants completed the measure of experience of sexual coercion (SCIRS). The order in which the video clip and the SCIRS were presented was counterbalanced. In the final part, participants provided demographic information and were debriefed. Sessions lasted approximately thirty minutes. All measures and procedures were approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the first author's university.

4.3 Measures

Video

A clip of 165 seconds from the Spanish film "No estás sola, Sara" ["You are not alone, Sara"] was used. This scene is about a couple in a romantic relationship, both of whom are university students. They are in the woman's bedsit studying for a university exam, when the man attempts to persuade the woman to have sexual intercourse. As the videotape progresses, the man engages in an escalating sequence of verbally coercive behaviors (during the first 105 seconds; for example, verbal pressure, emotional blackmail, signs of disgust and anger) and physical acts (in the last 60 seconds), ending with the man using physical force (holding her arms and legs, throwing her to the floor and physically blocking her body) to have sexual intercourse with her. The woman responds with verbal refusals and resistance throughout the interaction, clearly indicating that she does not want to have sex with her partner, but at the end of the scene, she stops resisting and remains immobile. After watching the video and in line with previous research, to assess the extent to which they were immersed in the experimental task, all participants were asked to rate how realistic the portrayed interaction was, using a scale from 1 (*completely unrealistic*) to 7 (*completely realistic*).

Manipulation check.

One question assessed whether the manipulation of the increase of sexual violence had the intended effect of invoking perceptions of greater severity ("How severe do you consider the situation shown in the video to be?"). This item was measured at Time 1 and Time 2, and the rating was made on a seven-point response scale: 1 (*not at all*), 7 (*very much*), with higher ratings reflecting greater perceived severity.

Perception of partner sexual assault

Two measures assessed the perception of sexual assault. The first was a response-latency measure, as developed by Marx and Gross (1995). In the standard use of the paradigm, participants are asked to stop the situation to indicate when "the man has gone too far," which is a useful indicator of threat detection. However, some studies suggest that the difference between victims and nonvictims lies not in their ability to recognize risky sexual situations but rather in their response to the risk of sexual assault (Vanzile-Tamsen, Testa, and Livingston 2005; Yeater et al. 2006). Therefore, instead of asking participants to indicate when the man had gone too far, we asked them to indicate at what point they would leave the situation if they were the woman in the scene, following the procedure used by Anderson and Cahill (2014). The score of interest is the length of time (measured in seconds) from the start of the video until the participant decides to stop the clip. Longer response latency is conceptualized as indicating a lower perception of sexual coercion. The second measure of perception was one item that evaluated the likelihood that the participant would terminate the relationship ("to what extent would you be willing to leave the relationship if the situation happened to you?"). Responses were made on a seven-point scale from 1 (*I would definitely not terminate the relationship*) to 7 (*I would definitely terminate the relationship*). Participants answered this item after stopping the video (Time 1) and after having seen the full video (Time 2).

Attributions of responsibility

Two items assessed the degree of responsibility attributed to the man and the woman ("to what extent do you consider the man/woman to be responsible for what occurred?"). Both ratings were based on a seven-point response scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*a lot*). Higher ratings reflect higher attributed responsibility. Participants answered these items at Time 1 and Time 2.

Emotional responses

Emotional responses to the video were measured using the valence and control dimensions of the Self-Assessment Manikin (SAM, Bradley and Lang 1994). Responses ranged from 1 (*very sad*) to 9 (*very happy*) on the valence dimension and from 1 (*with very little control*) to 9 (*with a lot of control*) on the control dimension. Participants indicated their emotional state at the beginning of the experiment (Baseline), after they decided to stop the video (Time 1), and after having seen the full video (Time 2). Furthermore, the negative scale of the *Positive and Negative Affect Schedule Scale* (PANAS; Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988) was administered. It consists of ten words describing different emotions (such as "irritable, upset, nervous"), and participants rated to what extent they experienced each presented emotion, using a scale from 1 (*very slightly*) to 5 (*very much*). Participants made these ratings at Baseline (α = .87), Time 1 (α = .82), and Time 2 (α = .79).

Previous sexual coercion by an intimate partner

The Sexual Coercion in Intimate Relationships Scale (SCIRS; Shackelford and Goetz 2004) was used to assess sexual coercion by an intimate partner. Participants indicated whether they had experienced any of ten coercive acts of *commitment manipulation*, in which men manipulate their partners by telling them that the couple's relationship status obliges them to grant sexual access (for example, ''my partner hinted that if I loved him, I would have sex with him''); nine coercive acts of *defection threat*, in which men threaten to pursue relationships with other women (for example, "my partner hinted that he would have sex with another woman if I did not have sex with him"); and fifteen coercive acts of *resource manipulation/violence*, in which men withhold or give gifts and benefits (n = 11 items) and/or threaten or use violence and physical force (for example, ''my partner threatened to use violence against me if I did not have sex with him; n = 4 items). Participants indicated whether they had experienced each act at some point in their life (i.e. in a past or current relationship), using a dichotomous response format: 0 (*has never occurred in my life*), 1 (*has occurred in my life*). As explained above, nonvictims were defined as scoring zero across all items of the SCIRS, and victims of sexual coercion were defined as scoring above zero on the thirty non-physical coercion items (but zero on the five physical sexual assault items). As noted in the sample description, the data of women who scored above zero on the physical assault items were excluded from the analysis.

Demographic characteristics

Self-identified gender and relationship status (and duration, if in a relationship) were assessed with standard demographic questions.

5 Results

5.1 Manipulation Check and Order Effects

To examine whether the manipulation of increase of sexual violence (Time 1 vs. Time 2) influenced perceptions of severity, we conducted a within-subjects ANOVA. As the results did not vary depending on response times, F (1, 135) = 0.67, p = .416, η^2_p = .01, the manipulation check was run without this control variable to increase statistical power. The analysis yielded a significant effect of time, F (1, 139) = 67.44, p < .001, η^2_p = .33. After having watched the full video (Time 2), participants perceived the situation to be more serious, M = 6.94, SD = 0.32, than at the point at which they had first stopped it (Time 1), M = 6.24, SD = 1.01.

Although the order of presentation of the video clip and the sexual victimization measure was counterbalanced, which should have ruled out systematic order effects, we tested for possible order effects by running a MANOVA with order (video clip before or after the SCIRS) as independent variable and response latency and probability of leaving the relationship at Time 1, as well as attribution of responsibility to the man and the woman, negative affect, control, and valence at Time 1 as dependent variables. The multivariate effect of order was nonsignificant, *Wilks'* λ = .92, F (7, 130) = 1.54, p = .161, η^2_p = .08. Therefore, order was not in-

cluded as a control variable in the hypotheses-testing analyses.

Regarding ecological validity, participants thought the portrayed interaction was quite realistic. They perceived the video to be more realistic after having seen the completed situation, M = 5.76, SD = 1.34, than at the point at which they had stopped the video, M = 5.44, SD = 1.43, F (1, 139) = 11.65, p = .001, η^2_p = .08. This reflects the greater ambiguity as to how the situation might progress at Time 1 than at Time 2. Victims and nonvictims did not differ on this measure, F (1, 138) = 0.74, p = .391, η^2_p = .01.

5.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

The means, standard deviations, and correlations for all dependent variables are presented in Table 1. Response latency for leaving the situation was positively correlated with negative affect and negatively with feelings of control. Probability of terminating the relationship was positively correlated with the degree of responsibility attributed to the perpetrator and with negative affect. The emotional measures were correlated at Baseline, Time 1, and Time 2. More negative affect was significantly related to lower feelings of control and less positive emotions, and more control was related to more positive emotions. The two attribution measures were uncorrelated with each other and with any of the other variables.

5.3 Perception of Partner Sexual Assault

To examine the hypothesized relation between previous sexual coercion and perception of partner sexual assault (*Hypothesis 1*), a between-subjects MANOVA was conducted. Victim status was the independent variable, and response latency for leaving the situation and probability of terminating the relationship at Time 1 and Time 2 were the dependent variables. Results revealed a significant multivariate effect of previous sexual coercion, *Wilks'* λ = .94, F (3, 134) = 3.10, p = .029, η^2_p = .07. Consistent with *Hypothesis 1*, victims were less likely than nonvictims to report that they would terminate the relationship at Time 2, F (1, 136) = 5.35, p = .022, η^2_p = .04, $M_{Victims}$ = 6.61, SD = 0.93, $M_{Non\text{-}victims}$ = 6.88, SD = 0.36. The univariate effect on terminating the relationship at Time 1 was nonsignificant, F (1, 136) = 2.96, p = .088, η^2_p = .02. The univariate effect on response latency was also nonsignificant, F (1, 136) = 2.66, p = .105, η^2_p = .02. In combination, these findings lend only partial support to Hypothesis 1.

5.4 Attributions of Responsibility

Two mixed-model ANOVAs tested whether victim status (*Hypothesis 2a*) and increase in severity (*Hypothesis 3a*) would differentially affect attributions of victim and perpetrator responsibility. Victim status was included as a between-participants variable, and increasing severity of sexual violence (Time 1 vs. Time 2) as within-participants variable. A preliminary analysis indicated that results did not vary depending on response times [F_{victim} (1, 135) = 0.02, p = .880, η^2_p = .00; $F_{perpetrator}$ (1, 135) = 0.99, p = .321 η^2_p = .01], so the hypothesis-testing analyses were run without this control variable in order to increase statistical power. Results indicated that, contrary to *Hypothesis 2a*, no significant effects of victim status were found on responsibility attributions to the victim, F (1, 138) = 1.95, p = .165, η^2_p = .01 and to the perpetrator, F (1, 138) = 0.25, p = .615, η^2_p = .00.

Furthermore, consistent with *Hypothesis 3a*, the effect of the increase in severity was significant for attribution of both victim responsibility, F (1, 138) = 5.14, p = .025, η^2_p= .04 and perpetrator responsibility, F (1, 138) = 9.51, p = .002, η^2_p = .06. As shown in Table 2 (within-participants columns), participants attributed more responsibility to the perpetrator, but also to the victim, at Time 2 than at Time 1.

Finally, the predicted interaction effect (*Hypothesis 4a*) between victim status and the increase of sexual violence severity on attributions was nonsignificant for both dependent variables: victim responsibility attributions, F (1, 138) = 0.46, p = .497, η^2_p = .00, and perpetrator responsibility attributions, F (1, 138) = 0.20, p = .656, η^2_p = .00.

5.5 Emotional Responses

Three mixed-model repeated-measures ANOVAs tested whether previous sexual coercion (*Hypothesis 2b*) and the increase of severity (*Hypothesis 3b*) as well as their interaction (*Hypothesis 4b*) would affect (1) negative affect, (2) valence, and (3) control. Victim status was included as a between-participants variable, and increase of the severity of sexual violence (Baseline, Time 1, Time 2) as a within-participants variable.

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the dependent variables

	Baseline			Time 1							Time 2					
	M (*SD*)	2	3	M (*SD*)	2	3	4	5	6	7	M (*SD*)	2	3	4	5	6
1. Negative affect	17.03 (6.49)	-.311***	-.459***	25.81 (6.99)	-.451***	-.415***	-.018	.102	.230**	.264**	32.16 (7.22)	-.462***	-.305**	.028	-.067	-.001
2. Control	6.91 (*1.42*)	--	.267***	5.21 (2.24)	--	.450***	.132	.005	-.111	-.291**	3.87 (2.34)	--	.467***	.057	.006	.151
3. Valence	6.64 (1.29)		--	4.12 (1.90)		--	.073	.085	-.112	-.089	2.72 (1.86)		--	.165	.003	.067
4. Victim responsibility				1.74 (1.47)			--	-.030	-.073	.023	1.99 (1.77)			--	-.056	-.081
5. Perpetrator responsibility				6.30 (1.47)				--	.187*	.076	6.71 (1.08)				--	.054
6. Probability of terminating the relationship				5.34 (1.48)				.	--	090	6.76 (0.69)					--
7. Probability of leaving the situation (response latency in seconds)				83.16 (26.95)						--						

Table 2: Attributions and emotions: means, standard deviations, and hypothesized contrasts

	Victim status (*between participants; H2a, H2b*)			Increase of severity (*within participants; H3a, H3b*)				Victim status x increase of severity (*interaction; H4a, H4b*)						
								Victims			Nonvictims			
	Victims	Nonvictims		Baseline	Time 1	Time 2		Baseline	Time 1	Time 2	Baseline	Time 1	Time 2	
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*F*	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*F*	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*F*
Victim responsibility	1.68 (*1.49*)	2.02 (*1.66*)	1.95		1.74 (*1.48*)	1.99 (*1.71*)	5.14*		1.59 (*1.43*)	1.76 (*1.55*)		1.86 (*1.51*)	2.18 (*1.81*)	0.46
Perpetrator responsibility	6.56 (*1.30*)	6.47 (*1.30*)	0.25		6.30 (*1.47*)	6.71 (*1.08*)	9.51**		6.38 (*1.52*)	6.73 (*1.08*)		6.23 (*1.43*)	6.70 (*1.08*)	0.20
Negative affect	25.99 (*7.37*)	24.20 (*6.41*)	4.27*	17.03 (*6.49*)	25.81 (*6.99*)	32.16 (*7.22*)	253.86***	17.56 (*6.93*)	27.27 (*7.73*)	33.13 (*7.45*)	16.60 (*6.11*)	24.61 (*6.12*)	31.38 (*6.99*)	0.79
Valence	4.15 (*1.62*)	4.77 (*1.67*)	8.19**	6.64 (*1.29*)	4.12 (*1.90*)	2.72 (*1.86*)	297.10***	6.14 (*1.39*)	3.83 (*1.73*)	2.49 (*1.73*)	7.04 (*1.06*)	4.36 (*2.01*)	2.91 (*1.94*)	1.19
Control	5.04 (*1.96*)	5.56 (*1.99*)	3.86*	6.91 (*1.42*)	5.21 (*2.24*)	3.87 (*2.34*)	133.09***	6.97 (*1.52*)	4.67^{a} (*2.19*)	3.49 (*2.18*)	6.86 (*1.35*)	5.65^{b} (*2.19*)	4.18 (*2.44*)	4.48*

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. ^{a,b} indicates a significant difference at $p < .05$ between victims and nonvictims.

Values are presented to reflect hypothesized contrasts for between participants and within participants (Hypotheses 2 and 3 columns), and to explore interactions (Hypothesis 4 column). *Hypotheses 2a and 2b* contrasted victims and nonvictims; *Hypothesis 3a* contrasted Time 1 and Time 2, and *Hypothesis 3b* contrasted Baseline, Time 1, and Time 2. For negative affect, the scale ranged from 1 to 50 (summation procedure), where higher ratings reflected greater negative affect. The scale ranged from 1 (low) to 7 (high) for victim/perpetrator responsibility, and from 1 (low) to 9 (high) for valence and control.

A significant main effect of victim status indicated that victims reported significantly less positive-valence affect, F (1, 138) = 8.19, p = .005, η^2_p = .06, more negative affect, F (1, 138) = 4.27, p = .041, η^2_p = .03, and marginally significantly lower feelings of control, F (1, 138) = 3.86, p = .051, η^2_p = .03, than nonvictims at all three time points (see Table 2, between-participants columns). These results provide full support for Hypothesis 2b.

The main effect of time was significant on negative affect, F (2, 276) = 253.86, p < .001, η^2_p = .65, valence, F (2, 276) = 297.10, p < .001, η^2_p = .68, and control, F (2, 276) = 133.09, p < .001, η^2_p = .49, consistent with Hypothesis 3b. Specifically, as shown in Table 2 (within-participants columns), participants reported more negative affect, less positive affect, and lower feelings of control at Time 2 than at Time 1 and at Baseline.

Finally, a significant time by victim status interaction was found for control, F (2, 276) = 4.48, p = .012, η^2_p = .03, consistent with Hypothesis 4b, as shown in Table 2. Victims of sexual coercion felt less in control than did nonvictims at Time 1, F (2, 135) = 5.14, p = .025, η^2_p = .04 (response latency was included as a control variable here because the length of time between baseline and Time 1 depended on response latency). However, no differences were found between victims and nonvictims on control at Baseline, F (1, 138) = 0.21, p = .648, η^2_p = .00, and at Time 2, F (1, 138) = 3.05, p = .083, η^2_p = .02. No significant interactions emerged for negative affect, F (2, 276) = 0.79, p = .454, η^2_p = .01, and valence, F (2, 276) = 1.19, p = .307, η^2_p = .01.

6 Discussion

The present study examined whether the experience of nonphysical sexual coercion by an intimate partner and an increase in the severity of observed sexual violence would be related to women's behavioral, cognitive, and emotional responses to a scenario describing a sexually coercive situation with a hypothetical partner.

The aim of the study was to examine whether previous sexual coercion by an intimate partner affects victims' evaluation of a sexual assault scenario. We predicted that prior experience of sexual coercion by an intimate partner would be linked to lower risk awareness, measured through participants' response latency before indicating that they would leave the situation and the probability that they would terminate the relationship. Regarding response latency, there was no evidence that victims took longer than nonvictims to stop the video to indicate the point at which they would leave the situation. Some past research also found no differences between victims and nonvictims in the length of time they allowed the simulated sexually violent situation to continue (e.g. Chu, DePrince, and Mauss 2014). However, there were differences in the probability of choosing to terminate the relationship at Time 2. As predicted in *Hypothesis 1*, women with the experience of sexual coercion by an intimate partner, compared to women without this experience, were less likely to say they would terminate the relationship when the situation increased in severity (Time 2). This result confirms prior research (Arriaga et al. 2016; Garrido-Macías and Arriaga 2020).

One possible explanation of the differences in the probability of terminating the hypothetical relationship, but not on response latency, is that the level of cognitive processing may play an important role. Stopping the video when they would leave the situation is a more spontaneous, situational decision, whereas deciding they would terminate the relationship involves a greater degree of conscious reflection. This higher cognitive processing involved in thinking about ending the relationship –as compared to leaving the sexually coercive situation – is consistent with the idea that victims of intimate partner aggression remember and process the transgression by minimizing or reinterpreting it to adapt their beliefs and therefore avoid the decision to end the relationship (Gobin and Freyd 2017; Goodfriend and Arriaga 2018). In this sense, it is possible that victims of sexual coercion were able to recognize the risk but decided they would to stay in the relationship for other reasons. For example, a lower probability of deciding to leave the relationship might be linked to higher levels of commitment or dependence (Garrido-Macías, Valor-Segura, and Expósito 2017; Valor-Segura, Garrido-Macías, and Lozano 2020), so victims would prefer to ignore or downplay the betrayal, something that would not happen in the case of sexual assault committed by a stranger. These possibilities should be ad-

dressed in future research by comparing responses of victims of partner vs. stranger sexual coercion. Such a comparison would also facilitate an examination of the impact of betrayal trauma on risk awareness and responses.

The hypotheses regarding responsibility attributions and emotional responses depending on victim status were only partially supported. The prediction that women who had suffered sexual coercion would assign less responsibility to the victim and more responsibility to the perpetrator than nonvictims was not supported by the data. This finding is inconsistent with Amacker and Littleton (2013), Grubb and Harrower (2008), and Miller et al. (2011) and fails to support *Hypothesis 2a*. However, the positive correlation found between responsibility attributed to the perpetrator and probability of terminating the relationship suggest that the more women blame the perpetrator, the more likely they would be to leave an abusive relationship (Edwards et al. 2012).

In support of *Hypothesis 2b*, victims of sexual coercion reported less positive-valence affect, more negative affect, and lower feelings of control than did nonvictims. These results are consistent with past research indicating that victims of sexual assault experience less positive emotions (Livingston et al. 2004; Soler-Baillo et al. 2005; Mason and Lodrick 2013; Jeffrey 2014) than nonvictims when they re-experience similar situations of sexual assault. Taken as a whole, these results indicate that victims may exhibit a different pattern of emotional reactivity in response to a sexual assault scenario compared to nonvictims, so that these altered emotional reactions might be related to victims' ability to react to these risky situations.

The hypotheses that increasing severity of the sexual violence would be linked to women's attributions (*Hypothesis 3a*) and emotional responses (*Hypothesis 3b*) were supported. Regardless of victimization status, women attributed more responsibility to the perpetrator after they had watched the full video (at Time 2) than when they stopped the video at the point at which they would leave the situation (Time 1). This finding confirms the results of previous research (e.g. Katz et al. 2007; Edwards et al. 2012) and is consistent with *Hypothesis 3a*. Unexpectedly, women also attributed more responsibility to the victim at Time 2 than at Time 1. Regarding this result, it is important to note that the woman stopped resisting at the end of the video when she realized she could not fight off the attacker (even though she clearly showed that she did not want to have sex and tried to resist all the time). This last scene, along with the fact that she told him not to make noise because her mother was downstairs, might have given the impression to participants that the victim accepted to have sex with him. Concerning emotions in relation to increasing severity (*Hypothesis 3b*) women reported more negative affect, less positive emotions, and lower feelings of control when the situation included physical force (Time 2) than at the point where they decided to stop the video. These results support the idea that the increasing severity of violence through greater use of forceful and physical tactics is associated with more negative emotional reactions (Ullman et al. 2007; Jeffrey 2014).

Finally, the predicted interaction effect between victim status and increasing severity of sexual violence on attributions (*Hypothesis 4a*) and emotions (*Hypothesis 4b*) was significant only for the feeling of control of the situation. Specifically, victims of sexual coercion by an intimate partner felt less in control than did nonvictims at Time 1, after having stopped the video. When both groups had seen the full video clip (Time 2), the difference between their emotional responses was superseded by a main effect of severity. Since Time 2 included physical force from which the woman was unable to escape, both victims and nonvictims realized that a loss of control had occurred. When they decided to stop the video (Time 1), there was more room for interpretation, as sexual coercion was less severe and there was a greater chance of controlling the situation, allowing the differences in the experiential background between victims and nonvictims with regard to sexual coercion to show an effect.

While the findings of this study shed light on the perceptual and emotional responses of victims and nonvictims of sexual coercion to a realistic film clip depicting a sexual assault, several limitations should be noted. First, our study adopted a quasi-experimental design in which women were assigned to the victim and nonvictim groups based on self-reported victimization. Therefore, the design is subject to the

problem of potential third variables inherent in any quasi-experimental comparison. We did not assess victimization experiences outside intimate partnerships and the domain of sexuality, so we were unable to examine in what other ways beyond the experience of sexual victimization by an intimate partner participants in the two groups may have differed and how these differences would have been linked to our dependent variables. Thus, our data cannot speak to a causal influence of prior victimization on responses to the sexual assault vignette. Victim status is a quasi-experimental variable by nature, and true experimental designs to capture the effects of differences in victim status are not possible. Prospective longitudinal designs would be needed to come closer to a causal analysis of the impact of victimization on subsequent processing of information about a sexual assault situation. Second, the sample consisted exclusively of college students, which does not allow us to generalize our results to other populations. Nonetheless, sexual coercion is a major issue on college campuses, and thus, college students are a population that is appropriate for studying sexual coercion (Krebs et al. 2016). Third, our findings could not support the differences between victims' and nonvictims' hypothetical threat responses in terms of leaving the sexually risky situation, which is at odds with some past research (Gidycz et al. 2006; Franklin 2013; Anderson and Cahill 2014). Due to the difficulty of differentiating between threat detection and threat response, as noted in prior research (for example, Franklin 2013), it is necessary to develop more suitable ways to measure women's responses to the threat of sexual assault. Furthermore, responses women give to fictitious situations in the laboratory may differ from their responses when facing the risk of sexual assault in their real life, although some research has shown responses in both situations to be similar (Turchik et al. 2007; Gidycz, Van Wynsberghe, and Edwards 2008). Finally, we were unable to elucidate the processes underlying the differences between victims and nonvictims established in our study. To explain why victims were less likely to say they would leave the relationship if their partner used sexual violence against them, different mediating processes could be considered. For example, victims may have less negative attitudes toward violence by intimate partners, which would make them less likely to leave an abusive relationship (McQuiller-Williams, Porter, and Smith 2016). The differences might also be due to 1) a greater identification of victims with the female character in the video clip or 2) by the activation of memories about their own victimization driving their affective states and sense of control. Future studies should include such process-related constructs to clarify the differences in processing assault-related information from the video among victims and nonvictims.

Despite these limitations, our findings suggest that the experience of sexual coercion by an intimate partner and the severity of the sexual assault may be related to women's behavioral, cognitive, and emotional responses to risky sexual situations. The results have implications for analyzing factors involved in the perception of sexual assault and how this perception determines the complex process of deciding whether to terminate, or remain in, a risky situation and an abusive relationship. They may also contribute to understanding the widely demonstrated risk of revictimization among victims of sexual aggression (Noll and Gyrch 2011; Decker and Littleton 2018). Additional research using experimental designs with sensitive measurement procedures is needed to strengthen and refine the findings reported here. Furthermore, more research is needed into the factors that may explain how women respond to the risk of sexual assault (for example, relational variables such as commitment and dependence) and what types of responses promote the ability to identify the risk of sexual aggression and engage in effective decision making.

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